

## CHAPTER 2

# Empowerment Theory

## *Psychological, Organizational and Community Levels of Analysis*

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Empowerment is both a value orientation for working in the community and a theoretical model for understanding the process and consequences of efforts to exert control and influence over decisions that affect one's life, organizational functioning, and the quality of community life (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995; Rappaport, 1981; Zimmerman & Warschausky, 1998). A distinction between the values that underlie an empowerment approach to social change and empowerment theory is necessary. The value orientation of empowerment suggests goals, aims, and strategies for implementing change. Empowerment theory provides principles and a framework for organizing our knowledge. The development of empowerment theory also helps advance the construct beyond a passing fad and political manipulation.

A theory of empowerment suggests ways to measure the construct in different contexts, to study empowering processes, and to distinguish empowerment from other constructs, such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, or locus of control. One definition of empowerment is useful, but appears to be limited to the individual level of analysis:

Empowerment may be seen as a process where individuals learn to see a closer correspondence between their goals and a sense of how to achieve them, and a relationship between their efforts and life outcomes (Mechanic, 1991).

Another definition explicitly incorporates person–environment interaction:

Empowerment is an intentional, ongoing process centered in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources (Cornell Empowerment Group, 1989).

A definition by Rappaport (1984) accounts for the fact that empowerment may occur at multiple levels of analysis: “Empowerment is viewed as a process: the mechanism by which

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people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their lives," but does not provide details about the process across levels of analysis. These definitions suggest that empowerment is a process in which efforts to exert control are central. These conceptual definitions also suggest that participation with others to achieve goals, efforts to gain access to resources, and some critical understanding of the sociopolitical environment are basic components of the construct. Applying this general framework to an organizational level of analysis suggests that empowerment may include organizational processes and structures that enhance member participation and improve organizational effectiveness for goal achievement. At the community level of analysis, empowerment may refer to collective action to improve the quality of life in a community and to the connections among community organizations and agencies. Organizational and community empowerment, however, are not simply the aggregate of many empowered individuals.

This chapter begins with a brief discussion of the value orientation underlying an empowerment approach to social change. Next, I briefly describe empowerment as theory. Finally, I examine the construct of empowerment at the individual, organizational, and community levels of analysis. These sections include a discussion of the parameters of empowerment, a brief review of relevant research, and suggestions for future research at each level of analysis. The chapter emphasizes the individual level because most of the research to date has been devoted to this level of analysis, but this focus is not intended to suggest its relative importance.

## EMPOWERMENT AS A VALUE ORIENTATION

Empowerment suggests a distinct approach for developing interventions and creating social change. It directs attention toward health, adaptation, competence, and natural helping systems. It includes the perspective that many social problems exist due to unequal distribution of, and access to, resources. Some individuals are best served by mutual help, helping others, or working for their rights, rather than having their needs fulfilled by a benevolent professional (Gallant, Cohen, & Wolff, 1985). An empowerment approach goes beyond ameliorating the negative aspects of a situation by searching for those that are positive. Thus, enhancing wellness instead of fixing problems (Cowen, Chapter 4, this volume), identifying strengths instead of cataloging risk factors, and searching for environmental influences instead of blaming victims characterizes an empowerment approach.

Empowerment calls for a distinct language for understanding lay efforts to cope with stress, adapt to change, and influence our communities. Rappaport (1985) describes how an empowerment-oriented language can help redefine our roles as professional helpers. He suggests that the traditional language used to describe the helping process unwittingly encourages dependence on professionals, creates the view that people are clients in need of help, and maintains the idea that help is unidirectional. The language of professionals limits the discovery of indigenous resources and reduces the likelihood of people helping each other. An empowerment approach replaces terms such as "client" and "expert" with "participant" and "collaborator."

An empowerment approach to intervention design, implementation, and evaluation redefines the professional's role relationship with the target population. The professional's role becomes one of collaborator and facilitator rather than expert and counselor. As collaborators, professionals learn about the participants through their cultures, their worldviews, and their life struggles. The professional works with participants instead of advocating for them. The

professional's skills, interests, or plans are not imposed on the community; rather, professionals become a resource for a community. This role relationship suggests that what professionals do will depend on the particular place and people with whom they are working, rather than on the technologies that are predetermined to be applied in all situations. While interpersonal assessment and evaluation skills will be necessary, how, where, and with whom they are applied cannot be automatically assumed, as occurs in the role of a psychotherapist with clients in a clinic. Fawcett et al. (1994) describe eight case studies that exemplify innovative roles for professionals interested in promoting empowerment among those with whom they are working. They provide a framework of empowering strategies that focus on capacity-building for individuals and groups, and creating environments that support the development of empowerment.

Kelly (1971) describes several qualities of a community psychologist that are consistent with an empowerment approach. These include giving away the byline, tolerance for diversity, coping effectively with varied resources, and creating an eco-identity (i.e., identifying with the community). These qualities suggest a capability to learn about the context within which one is working, and to accept and acknowledge the values of that context. Kelly (1970) also identifies several strategies for training that would help prepare community psychologists for applying an empowerment approach, including field-assessment skills, integrating theory and practice, and identifying resources in the community.

An empowerment orientation also suggests that community participants have an active role in the change process, not only for implementing a project, but also in setting the agenda. The professional works hard to include members of a setting, neighborhood, or organization so they have a central role in the process. Participants can help identify measurement issues and help collect assessment and evaluation data. The evaluation process not only includes participants in its planning and implementation, but the results are also shared. Feeding back information to the community and helping to use it for policy decisions is a primary goal. An empowerment approach to evaluation focuses as much attention on how goals are achieved as on outcomes. This approach suggests that both quantitative and qualitative methods are necessary for evaluation (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Kelly (1988) describes a process for prevention research that is consistent with an empowerment approach, and several investigators describe a participatory approach to research (Brown, 1983; Chesler, 1991; Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998; Pasmore & Friedlander, 1982; Peters & Robinson, 1984; Rappaport, 1990; Serrano-Garcia, 1984). Fetterman (1996) has also described empowerment evaluation as a process that not only involves participants, but also helps them develop skills for self-evaluation.

## EMPOWERMENT AS THEORY

A theory of empowerment includes both processes and outcomes (Swift & Levine, 1987). The theory suggests that actions, activities, or structures may be empowering, and that the outcome of such processes result in a level of being empowered. Both empowerment processes and outcomes vary in their outward form because no single standard can fully capture its meaning for all people in all contexts (Rappaport, 1984; Zimmerman, 1995). The behaviors necessary for a 16-year-old mother to become empowered are different from the behaviors for a recently widowed middle-aged man. Similarly, what it means to be empowered for these two individuals is not the same. Thus, empowerment is context and population specific. It takes on different forms for different people in different contexts.

A distinction between empowering processes and outcomes is critical in order to clearly define empowerment theory. Empowering processes are ones in which attempts to gain control, obtain needed resources, and critically understand one's social environment are fundamental. The process is empowering if it helps people develop skills so they can become independent problem-solvers and decision-makers. Empowering processes will vary across levels of analysis. For example, empowering processes for individuals might include organizational or community involvement; empowering processes at the organizational level might include shared leadership and decision-making; and empowering processes at the community level might include accessible government, media, and other community resources.

Empowered outcomes refer to operationalization of empowerment so we can study the consequences of citizens' attempts to gain greater control in their community, or the effects of interventions designed to empower participants. Empowered outcomes also differ across levels of analysis. When we are concerned with individuals, outcomes might include situation-specific perceived control, skills, and proactive behaviors. When we are studying organizations, outcomes might include organizational networks, effective resource acquisition, and policy leverage. When we are concerned with community-level empowerment, outcomes might include evidence of pluralism, the existence of organizational coalitions, and accessible community resources.

A thorough development of empowerment theory requires exploration and description at multiple levels of analysis. Citizens who unite to stop a chemical company from dumping toxic waste near their children's school are trying to exert control in their environment. They might create an organization to address the problem and educate their community. The organization could join other similar organizations so they can increase their base of support. Their community could then unite to elect officials that represent their concerns and allow them more access to governmental decision-making. Mechanisms of empowerment include individual competencies and proactive behaviors, natural helping systems and organizational effectiveness, and community competence and access to resources.

Each level of analysis, although described separately, is inherently connected to the others. Individual, organization, and community empowerment are mutually interdependent and are both a cause and a consequence of each other. The extent to which elements at one level of analysis are empowered is directly related to the empowering potential of other levels of analysis. Similarly, empowering processes at one level of analysis contribute to empowered outcomes at other levels of analysis. Empowered persons are the basis for developing responsible and participatory organizations and communities; it is difficult to imagine an empowering community or organization devoid of empowered individuals. Efforts to understand empowering processes and outcomes are not complete unless multiple levels of analysis are studied and integrated. An examination of empowerment theory (i.e., empowering processes and outcomes) at the individual, organizational, and community levels of analysis follows.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment at the individual level of analysis may be referred to as psychological empowerment (Zimmerman, 1990a; Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988). Psychological empowerment (PE) includes beliefs about one's competence, efforts to exert control, and an understanding of the socio-political environment. The specific actions one takes to achieve goals are not as important as simply being involved and attempting to exert control. Understanding one's socio-political environment—critical awareness—refers to the capability to

analyze and understand one's social and political situation. This includes an ability to identify those with power, their resources, their connection to the issue of concern, and the factors that influence their decision-making. Sue and Zane (1980) describe this process as understanding causal agents. A critical awareness also includes knowing when to engage conflict and when to avoid it, and the ability to identify and cultivate resources needed to achieve desired goals (Kieffer, 1984).

One way individuals can develop these analytic skills is through participation in activities and organizations. They may model others or gain experience by organizing people, identifying resources, or developing strategies for social change. Berger and Neuhaus (1977) suggest that increased opportunities for people to become involved in community organizations (e.g., churches, neighborhood groups, service organizations) will help to decrease a sense of powerlessness, alienation, and withdrawal from community living. These organizations, which they call mediating structures (because they mediate between large impersonal organizations and individual lives), provide opportunities for learning new skills, developing a sense of community, building a sense of control and confidence, and improving community life.

Thus, an empowered person might be expected to exhibit a sense of personal control, a critical awareness of one's environment, and the behaviors necessary to exert control. These different dimensions of PE can be identified as intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioral components (Zimmerman, 1995). The intrapersonal component includes personality (e.g., locus of control), cognitive (e.g., self-efficacy), and motivational aspects of perceived control (Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988). Perceived control may be specific to personal, interpersonal, or sociopolitical life domains (Paulhus, 1983). The interactional component of PE refers to how people use analytic skills (e.g., problem-solving) to influence their environment. The behavioral component of PE refers to taking action to exert control by participating in community organizations or activities.

Empowering processes at the individual level of analysis include experiences to exert control by participation in decision-making or problem-solving in one's immediate environment. This may be achieved through participation in community organizations or activities, being involved in work-site management teams, or learning new skills. Processes such as applying cognitive skills (e.g., decision-making), managing resources, or working with others on a common goal may all have empowering potential. Table 1 summarizes empowering processes and empowered outcomes for the individual, as well as the organizational and community levels of analysis.

**TABLE 1. A Comparison of Empowering Processes and Empowered Outcomes across Levels of Analysis**

Levels of analysis	Process ("empowering")	Outcome ("empowered")
Individual	Learning decision-making skills	Sense of control
	Managing resources	Critical awareness
	Working with others	Participatory behaviors
Organizational	Opportunities to participate in decision-making	Effectively compete for resources
	Shared responsibilities	Networking with other organizations
	Shared leadership	Policy influence
Community	Access to resources	Organizational coalitions
	Open government structure	Pluralistic leadership
	Tolerance for diversity	Residents' participatory skills

## Research Related to Psychological Empowerment

Three areas of research—perceived control, citizen participation, and direct efforts to develop empowerment theory—are reviewed briefly below as they pertain to psychological empowerment.

### *Perceived Control*

Perceived control is the belief that one can influence outcomes. The outcome can be achieving a goal or avoiding an undesirable situation. Individuals react differently to situations perceived as controllable versus those seen as uncontrollable (see Gatchel, 1980; Langer, 1983, for reviews). Investigators have found perceived control to reduce psychological stress (Fleming, Baum, & Weiss, 1987; Revicki & May, 1985; Vinokov & Caplan, 1986) and predict positive health behaviors (Labs & Wurtele, 1986; Sallis, Haskell, Fortman, Vranizan, Taylor, & Soloman, 1986; Seeman & Seeman, 1983; Visher, 1986). Perceived control is also related to social action and political involvement (Gurin, Gurin, Lao, & Beattie, 1969; Lefcourt, 1976; Zimmerman, 1989). The research literature is saturated with distinct measures of perceived control that can be categorized in personality, cognitive, and motivational domains (Zimmerman, 1986). The integration of personality, cognitive, and motivational domains of perceived control provides a basis for studying the intrapersonal component of PE.

The personality domain—locus of control—refers to one's beliefs about the cause of success and failure in one's life, and represents a disposition that includes a generalized expectancy about the relationship between one's actions and outcomes (Lefcourt, 1976; Rotter, 1966). The cognitive domain—self-efficacy—refers to the judgments one makes concerning how well one can perform behaviors necessary to achieve desired goals (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy may help determine what activities people engage in, how much effort they will expend to achieve goals, and how long they persevere in the face of adversity (Bandura, 1982). A particularly relevant situation-specific aspect of self-efficacy for PE is political efficacy (Craig & Maggiotto, 1982; Zimmerman, 1989).

The motivational domain of perceived control refers to the notion that mastery of the environment satisfies an intrinsic need to influence the environment (De Charms, 1968; White, 1959). Several investigators have reported that motivational deficits are associated with a perceived lack of control (Alloy, 1982; Glass & Singer, 1972; Sherrod, Hage, Halpern, & Moore, 1977). PE, however, includes more than simply feelings of control; it also includes behaviors to exert control.

### *Citizen Participation*

Participation in community organizations (e.g., neighborhood associations, mutual help groups, social change groups) is one way to exercise a sense of competence and control. Participants in a variety of community organizations have reported an increase in activism and involvement, greater perceived competence and control, and a decrease in alienation. This has been found for individuals involved in welfare rights organizations (Levens, 1968; Zurcher, 1970), nursing-home residents (Langer & Rodin, 1976), members of neighborhood associations (Carr, Dixon, & Ogles, 1976; Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; Florin & Wandersman, 1984), and union members (Denney, 1979).

Stone and Levine (1985) compared activists and nonactivists in the Love Canal environmental conflict—a crisis that affected a thousand families who lived next to an abandoned

toxic chemical site. Stone and Levine (1985) collected interview data from 39 individuals during the early stages of the citizen movement, and again several months later. Twenty-four of the respondents were activists. They were compared with their uninvolved neighbors on perceptions of how the Love Canal crisis had affected them personally, and how it influenced their social lives. These researchers found that activists felt better about themselves and reported stronger feelings of political efficacy than non-activists. They also found that activists lost some friends, but were more likely to have developed new friendships. Although research describing naturally occurring events cannot include random selection of people to participation and non-participation groups and, therefore, cannot address the possibility that individuals who chose to participate may already feel more empowered than those who do not participate (i.e., self-selection bias), the longitudinal nature of Stone and Levine's research lends support for the notion that efforts to exert control may have empowering potential.

Fawcett and his colleagues (1980, 1984; Balcazar, Seekins, Fawcett, & Hopkins, 1990) have reported community interventions for increasing individual control over important aspects of their lives. Their work illustrates how human-service professionals can help design and implement what they call social technologies. They use principles of learning theory to train individuals to either solve community problems or enhance community resources. The training provides individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary to gain control in their lives. Fawcett, Seekins, Whang, Muiu, and Suarez de Balcazar (1984) have trained leaders to chair meetings effectively, educate neighbors about the impact of new roadways in their neighborhood, and help handicapped individuals enhance the enforcement of parking regulations and increase awareness of the disabled. Balcazar et al. (1990) describe the results of the training for disabled persons.

### *Development of Psychological Empowerment Theory*

Two studies suggest that psychological empowerment is a combination of personal beliefs of control, involvement in activities to exert control, and a critical awareness of one's environment. The studies provide converging evidence using different research methods. Kieffer (1984) used a qualitative approach to describe the development of PE among community leaders. He conducted in-depth interviews with 15 individuals, including migrant workers, housewives, and miners who emerged as local leaders in grass-roots organizations. He reported that individuals felt more powerful as a result of their involvement, even if they did not actually gain more power. Kieffer (1984) concluded that empowerment encompasses the development of participatory competence that is composed of a positive sense of competence and self-concept, construction of an analytical understanding of the social and political environment, and cultivation of personal and collective resources for social action.

Zimmerman and Rappaport (1988) used a quantitative approach to examine the common variance among several measures of perceived control in student and community samples. They examined the relationship among 11 measures representing personality, cognitive, and motivational domains of perceived control, and participation. Participation was measured in three ways: (1) as an analogue of participation; (2) the level of participation in community organizations; and (3) the extent of involvement in community activities. The analogue measure used responses to hypothetical scenarios in which respondents were asked to indicate whether they would try to change the situations described. Level of involvement in community organizations was a composite of the number of months involved, the number of hours volunteered in a month, the number of leadership positions held, and attendance at organizational meetings for each organization in which respondents listed membership. Extent of

involvement in community activities was measured by a 26-item activity checklist that included voting, signing a petition, boycotting a product, organizing people, and writing a letter to an editor. Groups of individuals defined by the participation measures were then compared on the 11 indicators of empowerment.

Results of a discriminant function analysis indicated that the combined variance of the 11 measures of perceived control formed one dimension that distinguished high-participation groups from low- or no-participation groups. Similar results were found for students and community samples across the participation measures. Group differences remained when age, socioeconomic status, sociability, and social desirability were controlled statistically. The dimension that distinguished groups was identified as one component of PE because it represented three domains of perceived control. The results support the notion that PE includes personal control, a sense of competence, a desire to exercise control, and participation. A study using similar measures of participation, comparable measures of perceived control, and a random sample of urban residents replicates these findings (Zimmerman, Israel, Schulz, & Checkoway, 1992).

These studies suggest that psychological empowerment includes intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioral components (Zimmerman, 1995). The intrapersonal component refers to perceived control or beliefs about competence to influence decisions that affect one's life. The interactional component refers to the capability to analyze and understand one's social and political environment (i.e., critical awareness). This includes an ability to understand causal agents (those with authoritative power), their connection to the issue of concern, and the factors that influence their decision-making. A critical awareness also includes knowing when to engage conflict and when to avoid it, and the ability to identify and cultivate resources needed to achieve desired goals. The behavioral component includes participation in collective action, involvement in voluntary or mutual help organizations, or solitary efforts to influence the sociopolitical environment. The specific actions one takes to achieve goals are not as important as attempting to exert control and being involved with others to do so. Empowered individuals have some combination of a sense of control, critical awareness of their sociopolitical environment, and involvement in their community. One component does not necessarily lead to another, nor are they hierarchically ordered. Rather, these components may be found in varying degrees in an individual. It is possible, for example, to participate in collective actions but have little critical awareness or sense of control. Similarly, a person may be astute about causal agents that affect one's life, but take no action to influence those agents. All three of the components would be expected to a large degree in the most highly empowered individuals, but some amount of any of them would suggest some level of PE.

### **Directions for Future Research**

Although the perceived control literature, research on individual outcomes of participation, and comparative analyses of leaders and non-leaders or participants and non-participants are useful starting points, research on PE requires attention to the development of a theoretical framework that is particular to the construct. One research direction is to look at the interaction between perceived control and the development of personal resources. Zimmerman (1990a) has posited the idea of learned hopefulness, which addresses the positive psychological consequences of control experiences. The model, a counterpart of learned helplessness theory, focuses on the positive consequences of efforts to control outcomes. Learned hopefulness is a process by which individuals develop and use personal resources in an effort to exert control in



their lives. The resources one develops may include specific skills (e.g., leadership, problem-solving), social support, or knowledge about causal agents. The final outcome in the learned hopefulness model, consistent with an empowerment value orientation, is PE, rather than the decrease in self-concept and motivation found in the learned helplessness literature.

A significant barrier for studying PE is the development of appropriate measurement devices. The development of a universal global measure of PE, however, may not be feasible or conceptually sound, given that the specific meaning of the construct is context- and population-specific. This suggests that measures of PE need to be developed for each specific population with which one is working. Similarly, measures of PE in one life domain may not be appropriate to other settings of an individual's life. Measurement development must include the research participants to help create measures and to test and refine them. The research may also require intense observation and involvement with a particular population in a particular context as a first step in the research process. In-depth study of the research setting and population would not only add to our understanding of PE, but would also add insight into the organizational and community settings in which it develops.

Zimmerman and Zahniser (1991) describe the development of a socio-political control scale, and suggest that it measures two aspects of the intrapersonal component of PE that may be particularly relevant for members of voluntary organizations or individuals involved in community organizing. Items from ten measures that represented personality, cognitive, and motivational domains of perceived control were empirically selected and factor-analyzed. A two-factor solution was replicated across two samples and validity analyses were consistent across three samples. The factors were identified as policy control and leadership confidence; however, the limits of self-report scales designed to measure the intrapersonal aspects of empowerment are perhaps more instructive for future research than the scale itself.

Self-report measures can provide us with a convenient tool for data collection, but it is important to keep in mind the limits of such measures. Research that simply labels individuals based on their response to self-report items may not be the best way to develop the construct of PE. Self-report scales tend to suggest a static level of competence, an idea that is antithetical to the concept of empowerment. PE is not a trait that some of us are born with and others are not, nor is it a normally distributed individual difference variable; rather, it is earned, developed, and ongoing (Zimmerman, 1990b). All people have the potential to empower themselves. Measures must be population- and situation-specific and must include relevant aspects of perceived control, knowledge of causal agents, and participation (Zimmerman, 1995). Future research could also begin to examine the relationship among the intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioral components of PE for different populations and settings.

## ORGANIZATIONAL EMPOWERMENT

A distinction must be made between what the organization provides to members, and what the organization achieves in the community. Organizations that provide opportunities for people to gain control over their lives are empowering organizations. Organizations that successfully develop, influence policy decisions, or offer effective alternatives for service provision are empowered organizations. Although a distinction between empowering and empowered organizations is made, organizations may have both characteristics.

An empowering organization may have little impact on policy, but may provide members with opportunities to develop skills and a sense of control. Hobby clubs, for example, are typically not interested in political issues or community decision-making, but they do require

leadership, resource management, and coordination of activities. They also provide settings in which people with similar interests share information and experiences and develop a sense of identity with others. Organizations with shared responsibilities, a supportive atmosphere, and social activities are expected to be more empowering than hierarchical organizations (Maton & Rappaport, 1984; Prestby, Wandersman, Florin, Rich, & Chavis, 1990). Several investigators suggest that formal organizational practices may play a central role in empowering members (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Heil, 1991; Klein, this volume). Maton and Salem (1995) examined three community organizations to identify common empowering themes. They described four vital characteristics of an empowering organization: (1) a culture of growth and community building; (2) opportunities for members to take on meaningful and multiple roles; (3) a peer-based support system that helps members develop a social identity; and (4) shared leadership with commitment to both members and the organization. Gruber and Trickett (1987), however, point out that empowering organizational structures may also work to undermine the act of empowerment if members do not share real decision-making power.

Empowered organizations are those that successfully thrive among competitors, meet their goals, and develop in ways that enhance their effectiveness. Empowered organizations may or may not provide opportunities for members to develop a sense of empowerment, but they do become key brokers in the policy-decision process. Empowered organizations may extend their influence to wider geographical areas and more diverse audiences. They are also expected to effectively mobilize resources such as money, facilities, and members (Ferree & Miller, 1985; Jenkins, 1983; McCarthy & Zald, 1978). One way to efficiently compete for limited resources is to connect with other organizations to share information and resources, and to create a strong base of support. Table 1 presents characteristics of empowering and empowered organizations.

## **Research Related to Organizational Empowerment**

### ***Empowering Organizations***

Research on the characteristics of an empowering organization can be found in studies of organizational structure. Organizations with participatory decision-making structures may enhance opportunities for members to develop a sense of PE. The voluminous literature on participative decision-making in organizations suggests that participation leads to greater job satisfaction and productivity (Miller & Monge, 1986). Jackson (1983), for example, used a Solomon-four group design in a hospital setting to evaluate an intervention designed to increase employee participation in decision-making. She found participation reduced role conflict and role ambiguity, and increased perceived control and job satisfaction. Bartunek and Keys (1982) found similar results for an intervention designed to increase teachers' roles in school decision-making. An organization that provides opportunities for member participation in decision-making could be considered an empowering organization.

Social climate may also be a factor in determining the empowering potential of community organizations. Dougherty (1988) studied the relationships among social climate, participation, and personal and political efficacy for members of a neighborhood association. She found high levels of task orientation increased members' perceived control over neighborhood and local government policy. McMillan et al. (1995) also found that organizations that were task-focused and included pluralistic decision-making structures were more empowering than less

focused and inclusive settings. Maton (1988) examined the relationship between organizational characteristics and members' self-esteem, psychological well-being, and group appraisal among 144 members from three different self-help groups. He found members from groups with shared roles and responsibilities reported more well-being and self-esteem than members in groups where control was concentrated in a single leader. He also found that groups in which members perceived high levels of order and organization reported more benefits from group involvement than members in less organized settings.

### *Empowered Organizations*

Riger (1984) describes several factors that may influence the survival of feminist-movement organizations. She examined ideology, goal orientation, and decision-making procedures for several women's organizations. She found that unresolved conflict between ideology and the decision-making process often led to the demise of the organization. For example, strict adherence to collective decision-making was not always the most effective way to solve organizational conflict, but other types of decision-making processes were not congruent with the organizations' ideology, so members did not use them. Riger (1984) recommends that understanding the development and resolution of ideological conflicts in politically oriented organizations may help to insure their survival and enhance their empowering potential. Conflict-management issues may help distinguish between empowered organizations and those with less impact on policy.

Another approach to studying empowered organizations is to investigate how they develop and influence social policy. Checkoway and his colleagues (1980, 1982) report the development of a health-care consumer advocacy group. They describe how the consumers gained control of a county health planning board and proceeded to insure that their health-care needs were met. They included an analysis of the factors that contributed to the groups' success: (a) planning step-by-step procedures for achieving goals; (b) choosing issues of a broad concern that were also specific enough to appeal to many people; (c) collecting data to support their point of view; and (d) holding public meetings to present their findings and rally support. They also found that the group created alliances with other organizations to help them achieve their goals.

Zimmerman, Reischl, Seidman, Rappaport, Toro, and Salem (1991) describe the expansion strategies used by a mutual help organization for individuals experiencing emotional difficulties. The organization grew from 12 groups and a \$30,000 per year budget to 100 groups and a \$500,000 per year budget in a little over five years. The organization mobilized resources from a variety of sources, delineated responsibility for obtaining different resources, and targeted particular providers for specific resources. The organization also used the strategy of creating underpopulated settings (Barker, 1960; Perkins, Burns, Perry, & Nielsen, 1988) as a way to encourage individual involvement. The organization would create a setting before the necessary personnel were available to maintain it. These strategies appeared to avoid overtaxing resource pools, reduce job ambiguity, and encourage member participation.

Snow, Zurcher, and Elkind-Olson (1980) examined the membership recruitment strategies of several community organizations. They examined case studies of emerging organizations and queried university students about their involvement and recruitment experiences. They found that organizations that were linked to other groups and tapped social networks outside the organization grew faster and developed larger memberships than more isolated groups. Organizations, like individuals, may have a better chance of becoming empowered if

they are connected to other groups and exploit existing resources to foster development. Networking has been found to be related to organizational longevity and success for advocacy (Kelly, 1986) and citizen protest (Lindgren, 1987) groups.

### **Directions for Future Research**

Future research on the empowering potential of organizations could examine the relationship between skills learned from involvement and organizational characteristics. These issues can be examined for different types of organizations (e.g., policy change, community service, problem amelioration) and different organizational structures (e.g., participatory decision-making, decentralized authority). The social climate of organizations could also be used to distinguish different types of settings. For example, social climate variables such as organization, cohesion, self-discovery, and task orientation may be especially relevant for empowerment in some organizations, but not others.

Research on empowered organizations can expand on resource mobilization theory and research. Studies that describe processes for identifying, obtaining, and managing resources may help distinguish empowered organizations from organizations less effective in the policy process. Comparative studies of organizations with different resource mobilization strategies can help us understand the factors that may influence organizational empowerment. Research could examine the type of organizations that connect with other organizations, and the effects of networking on organizational survival and goal achievement.

Another research direction could be to evaluate the effectiveness of community organizations. Crosby, Kelly, and Schaefer (1986) describe six criteria for evaluating the success of citizen participation. They suggest that effective participation includes: (1) pluralistic representation; (2) skill-training and shared information for decision-making; (3) equal input at all stages of the decision-making process; (4) long-term evaluation of costs; (5) adaptable methods so several different tasks and decisions can be worked on; and (6) being seriously considered in final decisions. These criteria can be applied to different types of organizations as a way to examine empowering processes and empowered outcomes.

## **COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT**

An empowered community is one that initiates efforts to improve the community, responds to threats to quality of life, and provides opportunities for citizen participation. Iscoe (1974) identifies a community in which its citizens have the skills, desire, and resources to engage in activities to improve community life as a competent community. Cottrell (1983) describes a competent community by the extent to which interdependent components of a community work together to effectively identify community needs, develop strategies to address the needs, and perform actions to meet those needs. Minkler (1990) suggests that shared leadership and its development are critical for developing competent communities.

The structure and relationships among community organizations and agencies also helps to define the extent to which a community is empowered. An empowered community is expected to comprise well-connected organizations (i.e., coalitions) that are both empowered and empowering. It also has settings for citizen involvement in activities such as neighborhood crime prevention, planning commissions, and health care. This requires several different types

of voluntary organizations, resource accessibility for all members of the community, and equal opportunities for involvement.

An empowering community also includes accessible resources for all community residents. Resources include recreational facilities (e.g., parks, playing fields), protective services (e.g., police, fire), health and mental health care (e.g., emergency medical services), and general services (e.g., media, sanitation). Empowering communities, for example, are expected to have media resources available to residents. These might include accessible radio and television stations, as well as editorial pages open to multiple perspectives. A balanced presentation of the news helps to encourage critical discourse among residents, increases the chances that problem solutions would represent a variety of viewpoints, and suggests a tolerance for diversity. White (1981) provides a useful analysis of the power of the media and the importance of citizen involvement for influencing television programming (see also McAlister, this volume). Empowering processes in a community also include an open governmental system that takes citizen attitudes and concerns seriously, and includes strong leadership that seeks advice and help from community members. The town meetings popular in New England are a good example of a participatory governmental structure. Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of empowering and empowered communities.

### Research Related to Community Empowerment

O'Sullivan, Waugh, and Espeland (1984) report a case study of a Native American community's successful efforts to stop a relocation effort. Community leaders wanted to build a dam that would flood their tribal homeland. The Fort McDowell Yavapai Indians, a community of only 350 people, fought business interests and federal government regulatory agencies to prevent the flooding. Their efforts included using community surveys to show the psychological impact of relocation, uniting with local environmental groups, and exploiting the media to stop plans to build the dam. This is an excellent example of community empowerment because it highlights media accessibility, coalitions among organizations, and the critical awareness among residents to successfully influence causal agents.

Maynard (1986) describes how a town in New Hampshire successfully persuaded the U.S. Department of Energy to change its plans for building a nuclear waste repository in their community. She describes how the community obtained information on nuclear waste, informed each other of the implications of living near the dump site, and organized to remove their community from a list of potential sites being considered. This is a good example of united community leadership, competent residents seeking information on the issues, and dissemination of information throughout the community for individuals to make their own choices about the proposed dump site.

Freudenberg and Golub (1987) describe the development of the NYC Coalition to End Lead Poisoning. The coalition included housing activists, health educators, physicians, social workers, and community organizers. The coalition was established after early lead poisoning prevention efforts failed to maintain vigilance on the issue. They used small group meetings, community organizing, coalition-building, and mass-media coverage to alert residents about the problem of lead poisoning, and to motivate the city to develop more preventive efforts. This case study provides an example of the processes involved in an empowering community. Minkler (1985) describes efforts to foster social support and social activism among low-income elderly. Other examples of community-empowerment processes and outcomes can be

found for toxic waste issues (Levine, 1982), welfare and civil rights (Pivan & Cloward, 1977), arson prevention (Maciak, Moore, Leviton, & Guinan, 1998), community health and mental health services (Cravens, 1981), and neighborhood associations (Alinsky, 1971; Fish, 1973). These case studies emphasize the importance of organizational coalitions, media involvement, and pluralistic leadership.

Community network analysis may be a useful approach for describing empowered communities (Galaskiewicz, 1979; Morrissey, Tausig, & Lindsey, 1986). Galaskiewicz (1979) examined organizational networks in a community and identified monetary, informational, and supportive networks. The monetary network was bipolar with a private and public sector. The information networks were separated by activities, and included television and radio stations, newspapers, colleges, and organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce and United Way. The support networks were the least well-defined and included hospitals and social service agencies. He also studied the extent and density of the networks, and reported that the most central organizations were those with the most available resources.

Morrissey et al. (1986) studied mental health system networks in two communities. They interviewed agency directors about their organizational affiliation with other similar service organizations in the community and found little evidence for a formally coordinated system of services for the chronically mentally ill, but the agencies did play a role in connecting disjointed agency sectors. They also found that institutionally based and community-based services worked primarily independently of one another. Community network analysis suggests that organizational relationships may be useful for identifying factors that enhance or inhibit community involvement and understanding resource accessibility.

### **Directions for Future Research**

The structure and content of community networks may help to identify the level of integration, shared problem-solving, and cooperation among organizations in a community. Organizational network analysis is particularly relevant for community empowerment because it can be used to describe the nature of resource exchange and the amount of integration among community organizations. Network analysis can also be useful for understanding the connections among causal agents and their relationships with resource distribution and accessibility.

Future research at the community level of analysis could also begin to identify environmental factors associated with empowerment. Some areas within a city may be more empowering than others because they have active neighborhood associations, access to government officials, and shared leadership. Environmental factors such as housing and common spaces may help influence the empowering potential or the level of empowerment within a given section of a city. It may be easier, for example, to organize residents living in high-density housing where accessible meeting places are available than in more dispersed housing conditions with limited public space. Perkins, Florin, Rich, Wandersman, and Chavis (1990) found that the physical environment of a neighborhood was related to residents' level of participation in a neighborhood association.

Research on community empowerment could also begin to examine how empowered individuals work together to create competent communities. This research might examine how leadership develops in the community and the organizations or settings in which it develops. The opportunities for getting involved and their accessibility to residents may be an important part of research on leadership development. Research on community empowerment might also

examine the source and flow of different resources, and study how individuals unite to gain access to a greater share of community resources.

### CRITICAL ANALYSIS

While empowerment theory is a fundamental concept in community psychology, it remains somewhat enigmatic. It is certainly not a panacea for solving community problems, conducting research, or understanding natural helping systems. In some instances, it may actually be used as an excuse to hold individuals responsible for their life situations, and provide a rationale for relieving institutional responsibility to take care of people and communities through structural interventions. It is a useful construct that is consistent with our values, helps redefine our roles as professionals and our community collaborators, and gives us a conceptual framework to understand community participation. Yet it is not a remedy for all problems and is not applicable in all contexts. Conversely, the difficulty in measuring empowerment has led some to dismiss its usefulness, but that does not diminish its validity as a vital concept for the field. Empowerment may be most useful as a heuristic for our work. One could argue that empowerment is only of interest to the extent that it results in some other outcome. Zimmerman et al. (1997) describe an intervention designed to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS among Mexican males living on the border between the United States and Mexico. The intervention used an empowering process whereby participants were involved in developing, implementing, and evaluating the intervention. Participants soon took over leadership of the project by setting the agenda for topics covered, developing resources for the intervention, planning strategies to distribute condoms, providing assistance to people with HIV/AIDS, conducting community education campaigns, and forming partnerships with other organizations. The evaluation of the intervention included attitudes, knowledge, and behavior related to HIV/AIDS prevention, but did not assess individual empowerment outcomes (i.e., psychological empowerment). The results indicated that participants engaged in more preventive behaviors than did non-participants. This study suggests that empowering strategies may be beneficial regardless of the effects they may have on the level of empowerment achieved for participants (psychological).

Another issue raised about empowerment is that it is equivalent to power. The two constructs are fundamentally connected, but they are not the same (Zimmerman, 1995). Power that refers to authority is not analogous to empowerment. Several researchers have reported instances in which politically disenfranchised groups with no official authority struggled to influence those with governmentally mandated power and succeeded (e.g., Freudenberg & Golub, 1987; Minkler, 1985; O'Sullivan, Waugh & Espeland, 1984). They may not have gained any real authoritative power, but they did influence the decisions of those in power. Empowerment may be more closely linked to social power (Speer & Hughey, 1995), which refers to the application of resources to hinder or facilitate community decision-making. While this type of power is not authoritative power, it does involve the capability to reward (or punish) causal agents, influence public debate and policy, and shape community ideology and consciousness. Speer and Hughey (1995) suggest that community organizations provide the means by which disenfranchised individuals gain social power. Power is linked to empowerment because the theory includes issues regarding the struggle for power, power relationships, and efforts to exert control over, or influence on, community power structures, but they are distinct constructs.

Although empowerment theory has consistently included multiple levels of analysis, the preponderance of research has been on psychological empowerment. This may lead to the erroneous conclusion that empowerment is solely an individual-level construct. Efforts to understand organizational and community empowerment are clearly necessary to help move the theory beyond the individual bias of psychology. The theory may also unintentionally suggest that conceptions of control, participation, and community favor traditionally masculine and Western standards. This, too, may be an erroneous assumption because the particular definition or meaning of the concepts in empowerment theory depends on the population with whom one is working, and the context in which the work is being done. Zimmerman (1995) points out that empowerment is an open-ended construct that may not be fully captured by a single operationalization uniformly applied because, by its very nature, it takes on different forms in distinct populations, contexts, and times. In the final analysis, empowerment theory is an effort to provide a conceptual framework for understanding processes and outcomes associated with the continuing struggle to make our lives, organizations, and communities closer to our ideal. The closer the correspondence between our goals, our sense of how to achieve them, and our efforts to succeed, the closer we are to being empowered.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Participation, control, and critical awareness are essential aspects of empowerment. At the individual level of analysis, these factors include a belief in one's ability to exert control (intrapersonal component), involvement in decision-making (behavioral component), and an understanding of causal agents (interactional component). At the organizational level of analysis, these factors refer to settings that provide individuals with opportunities to exert control and organizational effectiveness in service delivery and the policy process. At the community level of analysis, these factors refer to the contexts in which organizations and individuals interact to enhance community living, and insure that their communities address local needs and concerns.

Social change and policy developed from an empowerment perspective requires a redefinition of terms and methods. Professional help that limits itself to experts giving advice in an office or to intrapsychic adjustment to current social realities is antithetical to an empowerment approach. An empowerment approach is concerned with resources and formal settings for enhancing natural helping systems and creating opportunities for participatory decision-making. The focus is on enhancing strengths and promoting health, rather than fixing problems and addressing risk factors.

Empowerment theory connects individual well-being with the larger social and political environment, and suggests that people need opportunities to become active in community decision-making in order to improve their lives, organizations, and communities. Individual participants may develop a sense of empowerment even if wrong decisions are made because they may develop a greater understanding of the decision-making process, develop confidence to influence decisions that affect their lives, and work to make their concerns known. Organizations may be empowering even if policy change is not achieved because they provide settings in which individuals can attempt to take control of their own lives. Communities may enhance opportunities for residents to participate in the policy process even if some battles are lost. A community can be empowered because the citizens engage in activities that maintain or improve their collective quality of life.



Empowerment is a multilevel construct that requires us to think in terms of health promotion, self- and mutual-help, and multiple definitions of competence. Research on empowerment will add to our understanding of individual adaptation, organizational development, and community life. Empowerment is an individual-level construct when one is concerned with intrapersonal and behavioral variables, an organizational-level construct when one is concerned with resource mobilization and participatory opportunities, and a community-level construct when sociopolitical structure and social change are of concern. We can begin to learn about the contexts in which empowerment takes place and the processes by which empowerment develops if we study the settings that provide opportunities for natural helping systems to flourish and grow.

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## CHAPTER 3

# Individualism, Collectivism, and Community Psychology

COLLIN VAN UCHELEN

### INDIVIDUALISM, COLLECTIVISM, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH

A continuing challenge for researchers in community psychology is conceptualizing community phenomena at a collective level with appropriate theoretical constructs (Heller, 1989). However, the pervasiveness of an individualistic ideology in psychology makes it difficult to conceptualize psychological phenomena in terms of a collectivistic perspective. Individualism, and its conceptual counterpart, collectivism, are basic assumptive world views that vary within and across cultures. While both individualism and collectivism influence the nature and expression of psychological phenomena, psychological theory and practice generally assume an individualistic perspective. Awareness of the hidden bias of individualism is particularly important for those who wish to be sensitive to cultural diversity (Vega, 1992). In developing constructs that reflect a collectivistic perspective, the individualism embedded within our discipline must be identified and challenged.

In the following, I describe individualism and collectivism, and highlight the prominence of individualism in psychological research. I illustrate some ways to identify individualistic assumptions through a critical analysis of psychological conceptualizations of power and control. I discuss the implications of this critique for developing a more collectivistic perspective that highlights the shared and relational aspects of power and control. I then present some additional examples of community psychology research that provide collectivistic perspectives on psychological phenomena. Finally, I conclude by summarizing themes from these examples that may be useful to those interested in adding such perspectives to their own research.

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